DARK
HORSE
MANGA
BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL
129
$2.99 US
BADGER HOLE
2 of 4
HIROAKI SAMURA
BLADE
OF THE IMMORTAL
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BLADE OF THE IMMORTAL

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MANJI

Immortal *rōnin*, vowed to protect Rin and aid her in her quest for revenge.

RIN

Last heir of the Mutenichi-*ryū dōjō* which was destroyed by the Ittō-*ryū*.

HABAKI KAGIMURA

Powerful *bangashira*, serving the shogun and seeking the secret of immortality.

DŌA

A small, brash Ittō-*ryū* warrior, quick on her feet and eager to brawl.

ISAKU

Dōa's trusted bodyguard, a hefty Ittō-*ryū* warrior arrested for a street fight Dōa started.

BURANDO

Deranged doctor and pioneer in *kessen-chu* transference.

THE STORY SO FAR

Infected by *kessen-chu*, mystical bloodworms which can heal all wounds and grant their host immortality, Manji's bloodthirst led to the capture and murder of his sister. To atone for this and for the 100 innocent people who died at his hand while he served a corrupt lord, Manji vowed to slay 1,000 evil men in exchange for the release of death.

Imprisoned in an underground cell beneath Edo Castle, Manji is an unwilling participant in Habaki Kagimura's regenerative *kessen-chū* experiments. Burando, Kagimura's lead doctor, is having some success, but all of his "miracle patients" wind up crazier than he is. While searching for Manji and Isaku, Rin and Dōa stumble across a mountain of dead bodies and a simple-minded beggar who leads them to the "Badger Hole"—an entrance to the subterranean tunnel system that runs beneath Edo Castle and possibly to Kagimura's cruel prisons. After a violent false start, the ladies are now fully armed, ready to explore, and determined to find their missing friends . . .

designer SCOTT COOK editorial assistant RYAN JORGENSEN
editor PHILIP SIMON publisher MIKE RICHARDSON

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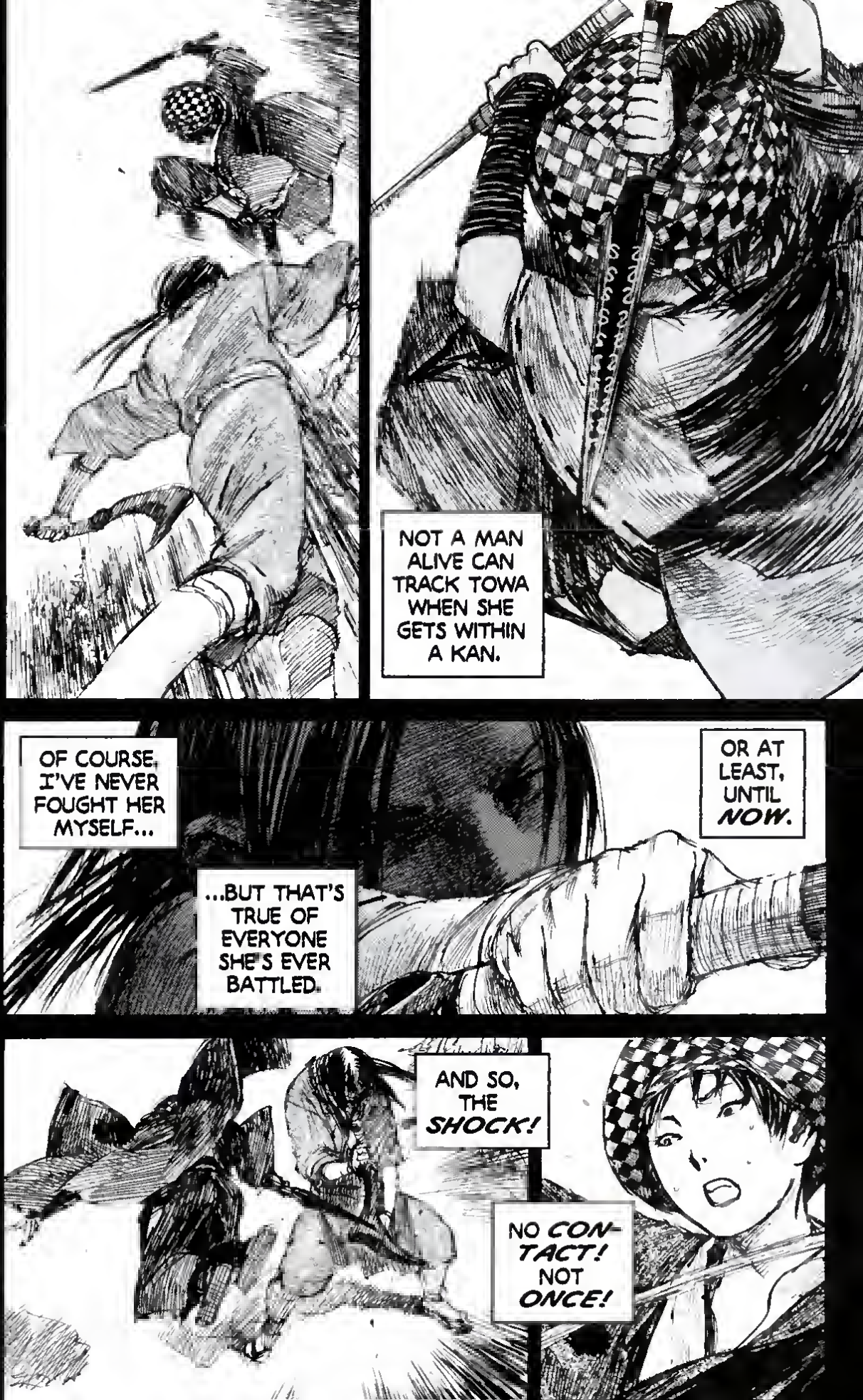
無限の住人

BADGER HOLE
-part two-

TOWA.
TOWA!

TOWA, OPEN YOUR--
DON'T SHAKE HER!
IT'S JUST A CONCUSSION. SHE'LL COME TO IN TIME.
A ZUKIN LAYERED WITH AN IRON PLATE. NOT BAD... FOR A TOY DREAMED UP BY BANDITS.
YET SHE WAS UNABLE TO TELL AT A GLANCE IF IT WOULD TURN MY WEAPON.
INEXPERIENCED IS THE BEST I CAN SAY.

TO FIGHT THAT WAY?!
IMPOSSI-BLE!
BUT TO USE IT IN BATTLE?
YES... IT'S TRUE. LOOKING AGAIN...
...YOU CAN TELL IT'S ONE *HEAVY* AXE.
JUDGE... AT A GLANCE?


NOT A MAN ALIVE CAN TRACK TOWA WHEN SHE GETS WITHIN A KAN.
OF COURSE, I'VE NEVER FOUGHT HER MYSELF...
...BUT THAT'S TRUE OF EVERYONE SHE'S EVER BATTLED.
OR AT LEAST, UNTIL *NOW*.
AND SO, THE *SHOCK!*
NO *CONTACT!* NOT *ONCE!*

IT'S A BIG WORLD!
YET... THIS MAN! WITH ALL HIS BRILLIANT TECHNIQUE. NOT ONCE DID HE ATTACK.
"YOU FOOLS AREN'T WORTH KILLING. BEGONE!" THAT CONTEMPT ONLY RILED TOWA MORE.
WHEN I CLOSE IN, HE BRUSHES ME AWAY.
MOCK-ING ME.
BUT TO CHARGE IN AT THIS DISTANCE...?
HE'LL BRING THAT THING STRAIGHT DOWN!
CORRECT CHOICE... EXCEPT FOR HIM.
EIYAAA!
YES! WHO WOULD THINK IT?!

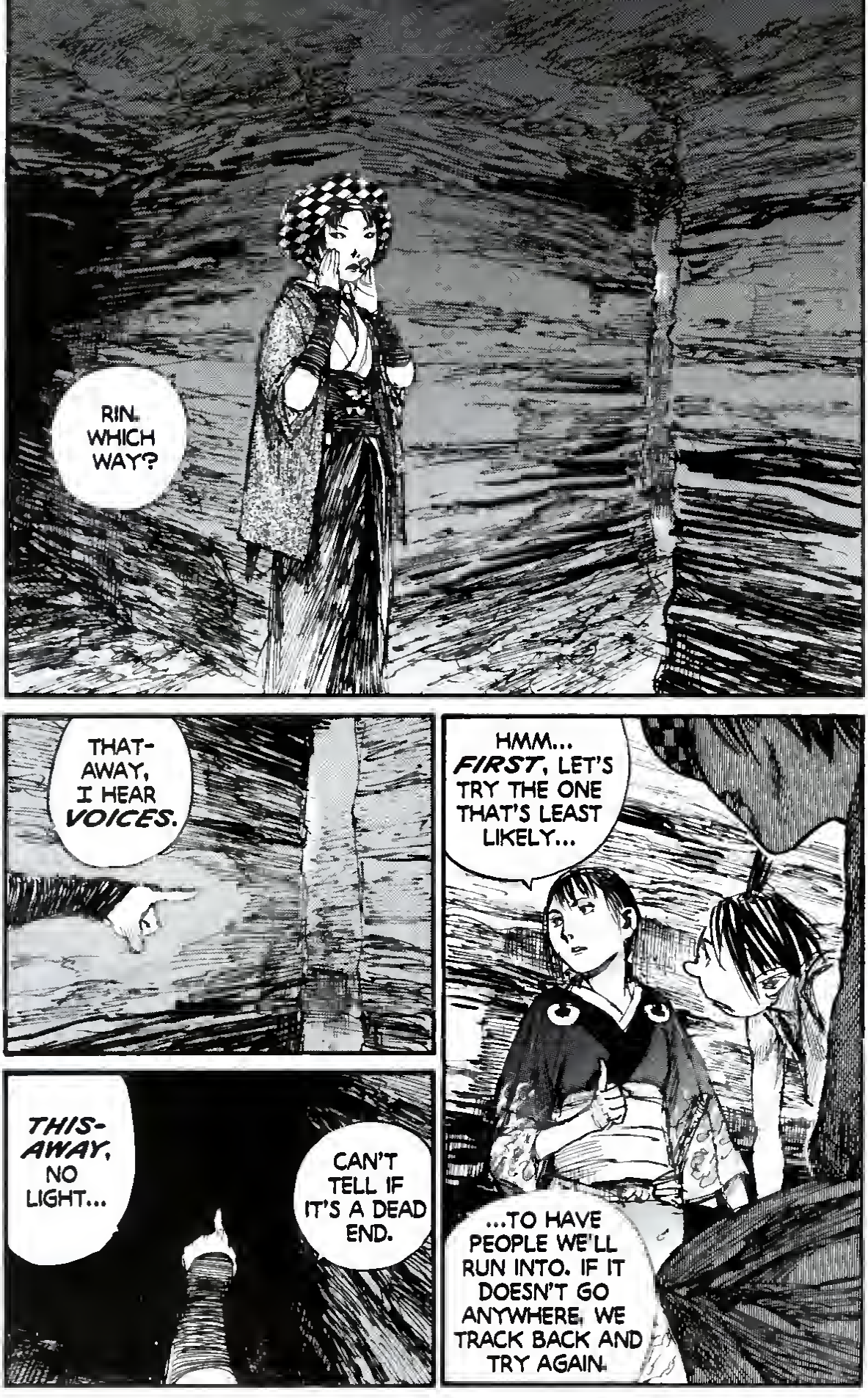
WIELDING THAT MASSIVE WEAPON...
...SO SWIFT AND SO NIMBLE!
YOU WON'T FIGHT...?
EH? N-NO, NO...

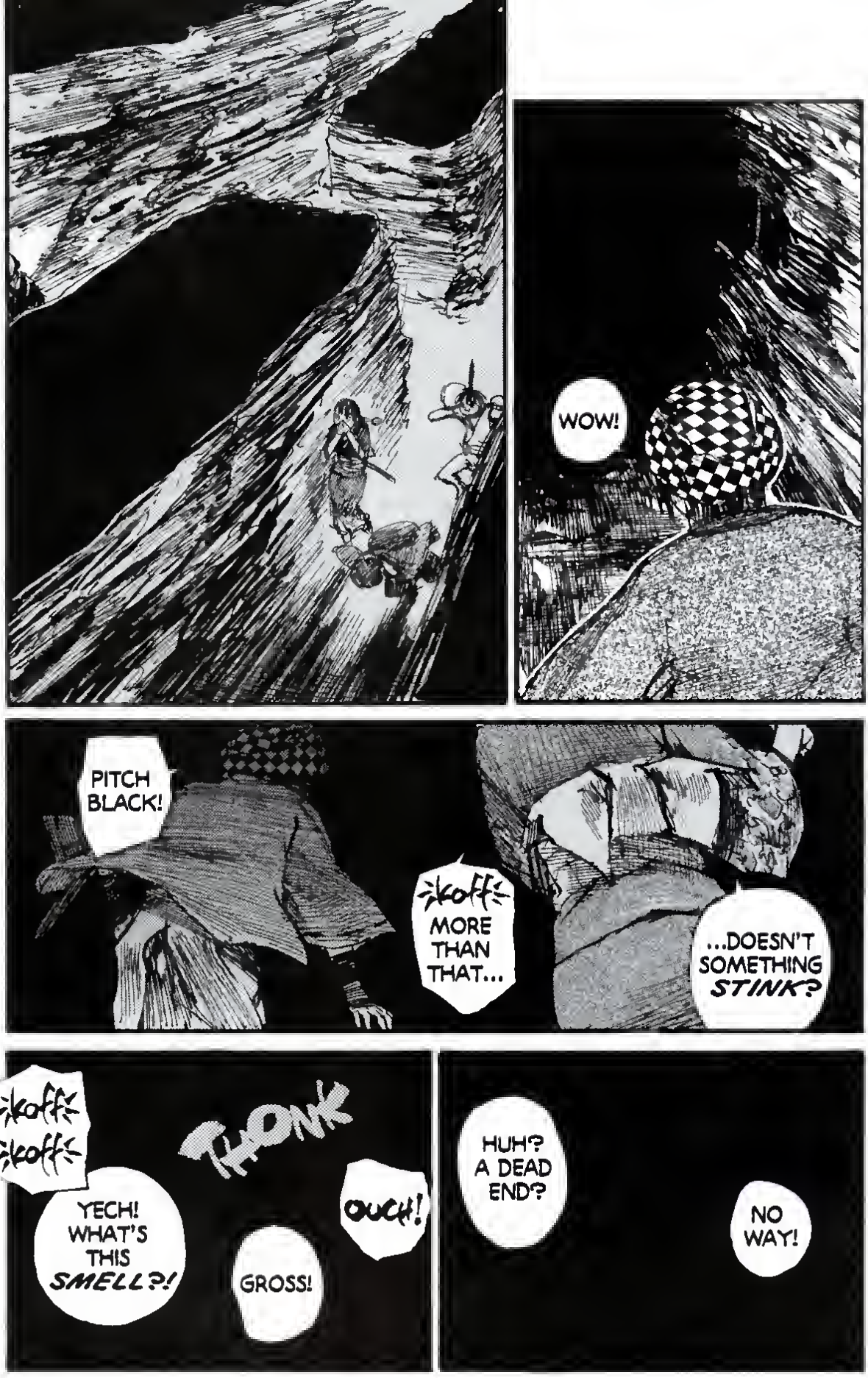
I-I CAN'T KILL... PEOPLE.
HER DEFEAT IS... OUR DEFEAT.
AWFUL PRONUN-CIATION.
A HALF-BAKED MISSION-ARY, PLAYING BANDIT?
SURELY SHE DIDN'T *LEARN* THAT SWORD-WORK?
N-NO, SIR.
TOWA'S SWORD...? AMATEUR.
BUT CATCHING BIRDS IN TREES...OR HUNTING *TANUKI*?
BEST IN THE *KOTAN*.
AH HAH HAH! *BRILLIANT!*
LEARNING TO MOVE LIKE THAT FROM *LIFE!*

IF YOU GET BORED BEING THIEVES, COME *HERE*.
WE'RE THE LAST PLACE OUTSIDERS LIKE YOU WASH UP.
I'LL TEACH YOU THE WAYS OF POWER.

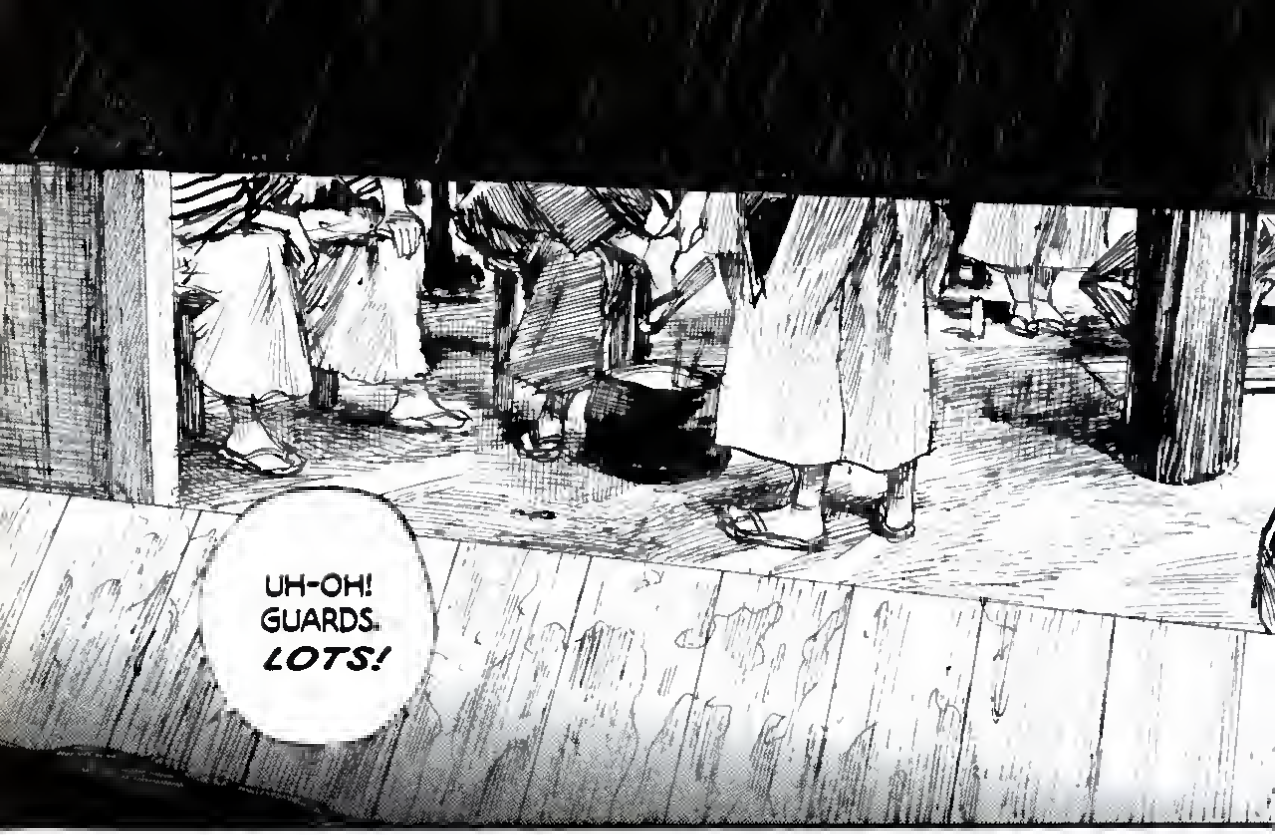
WOW. WHAT A COOL THING TO SAY.
THE TŌSHU'S ALWAYS COOL.
'COURSE, I JUST HEARD IT FROM ISAKU.
I WAS OUT COLD.
MYSTE-RIOUS? HOW SO?
THE TŌSHU'S A COOL AND MYSTERI-OUS MAN.
WHEN I LOOK DEEP INTO HIS EYES...
...IT'S LIKE MY HEAD'S ALL FLASHING...AND WORDS POP OUT THAT I NEVER USE. NOW THAT'S MYSTERIOUS...
MAYBE IT'S BECAUSE HE CLOB-BERED YOU?
ANYWAY, YOU GOTTA HAVE PHI-LOSOPHY WHEN YOU KILL PEOPLE. LIKE IN ITTŌ-RYŪ.
YOU GET THAT-- RIGHT, RIN?
NO, I DON'T!

...IT'S LIKE SAYING IDEOLOGY MAKES KILLING OKAY!
THAT KIND OF THINKING...
OH, RIGHT, RIN.
DIDN'T YOU TELL ME YOU'VE KILLED PEOPLE, TOO?
...I HAVE... YES, I HAVE, OKAY?!
BUT COMPARED TO YOU, THE WEIGHT... THE BOUND-ARIES...
LOOK, CAN WE STOP TALKING ABOUT IT?
HRMM... SHE'S RIGHT. IT'S ME WHO'S MIXED UP.
GOING ON LIKE THAT WHEN MANJI'S IN DANGER...


RIN. WHICH WAY?
THAT-AWAY, I HEAR VOICES.
HMM... FIRST, LET'S TRY THE ONE THAT'S LEAST LIKELY...
THIS-AWAY, NO LIGHT...
CAN'T TELL IF IT'S A DEAD END.
...TO HAVE PEOPLE WE'LL RUN INTO. IF IT DOESN'T GO ANYWHERE, WE TRACK BACK AND TRY AGAIN.

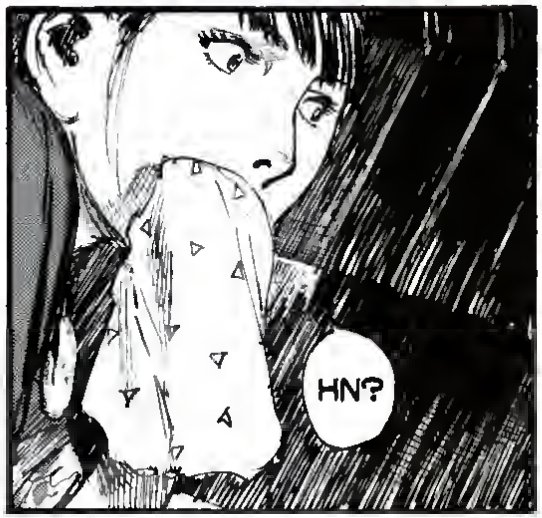

WOW!
PITCH BLACK!
koff MORE THAN THAT...
...DOESN'T SOMETHING *STINK*?
koff *koff*
YECH! WHAT'S THIS *SMELL*?!
THONK
OUCH!
GROSS!
HUH? A DEAD END?
NO WAY!

BUT THERE'S *LIGHT*.
OH, YOU'RE RIGHT.
Phew!


UH-OH! GUARDS. LOTS!

SEVEN... EIGHT... NINE...
NO! THAT MANY?

YUP. MAYBE MORE AGAINST THIS WALL...


HN?

!

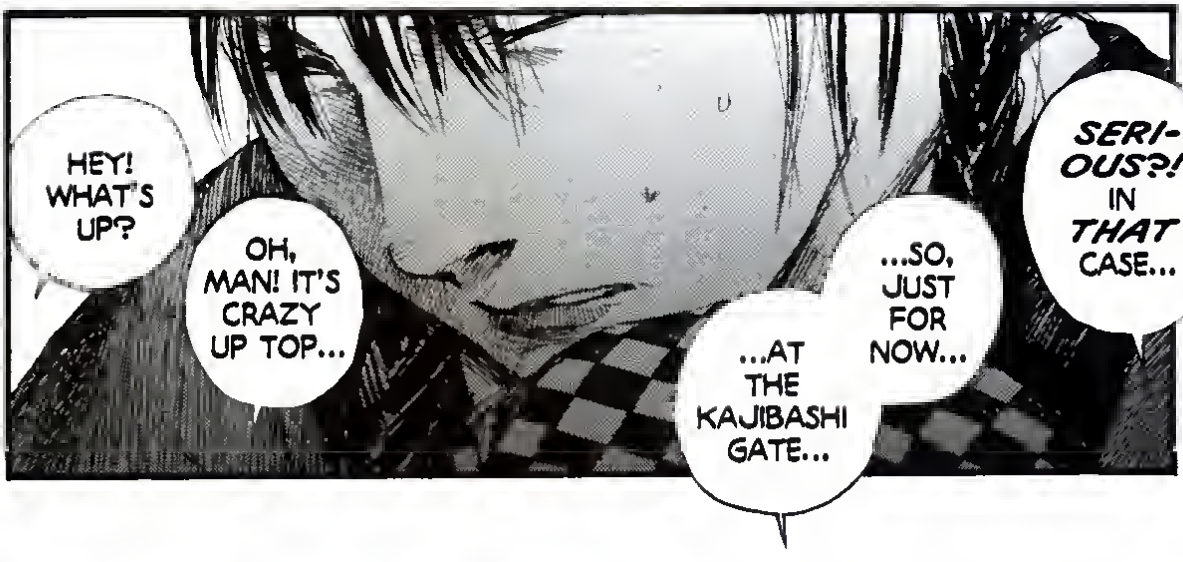
...whew...
SHAAA
HM?
WHAT'S THAT DOING THERE?
HEY! HIKO-ZO!
YOU DROPPED YOUR HAND CLOTH.
ME? I GOT MINE ...SEE?

DUMMY, DUMMY, DUMMY!!
TAKA-BATAKE. IS THAT *YOUR* CLOTH IN THERE?
DIDN'T BRING ONE.
MAYBE THERE'S SOMEONE ON THE *OTHER* SIDE...
eep..!
DŌA, WHA--
RIGHT. WE'LL JUST HAVE TO KILL THEM ALL.
DŌA, THAT'S SO *WRONG!*
THE *SOONER* THE *BETTER*, RIN!

FIRST STRIKE. CERTAIN VICTO-- NGMFF!
PLEASE. JUST UNTIL THEY SPOT US? OKAY, DŌA?
MAYBE THE BEGGARS ARE GOOFING OFF?
THAT'D BE MY GUESS.
ROT OUT MY NOSE...
FWAP FWAP

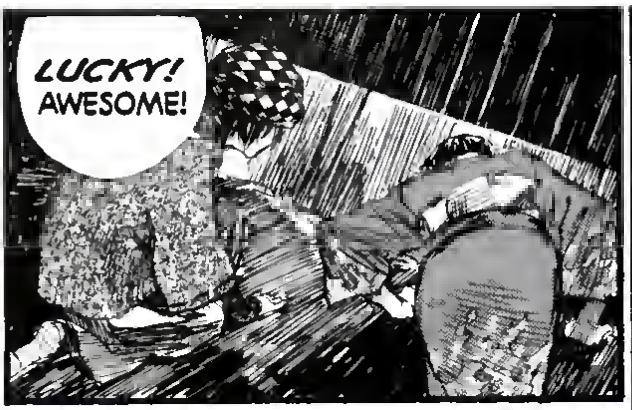
HUH?!

!!

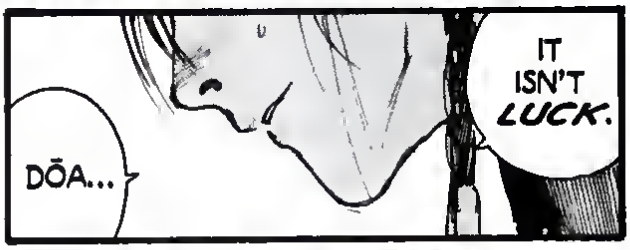

HEY! WHAT'S UP?
OH, MAN! IT'S CRAZY UP TOP...
...AT THE KAJIBASHI GATE...
...SO, JUST FOR NOW...
SERI-OUS?! IN THAT CASE...

BUT WHAT ABOUT DOWN HERE?
HABAKI-DONO SAID TO LEAVE THREE MEN AT LEAST...
YEAH!
DAMN... LET'S GO.
.....
.....
.....?
OH?! SORRY!
RIN... CAN'T... BREATHE...

.....
.....
IT'S LIKE... THEY GOT UP AND LEFT.


LUCKY! AWESOME!

THE TABLE'S SET!
IT'S ALL IN PLACE! ALL THE INGREDI-ENTS.


IT ISN'T LUCK.
DŌA...

INGREDIENTS? TABLE? MISO SOUP?!
HUHH?!

GET BACK! BACK!!
WHERE DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? CONFOUND YOU!

O-SAMURAI-SAMA!
GIVE ME BACK MY HUS-BAND!
IDIOT!
I DON'T KNOW WHERE YOUR DAMN HUSBAND IS!
LIAR! THE O-BUGYO-SAMA--
--HE SAID, "YOUR DADDY'S IN THE CASTLE!"
SHUT UP! SHUT UP!!
SHE'S RIGHT! IT'S TRUE!
KITAMACHI-SAMA SAID IF WE WANT TO FIND OUR HUSBANDS, ASK THE BAN-GATA! HE LOOKED SORRY, HE DID!

SHUT UP, YA SAY? DEVILS! MON-STERS!
WE ALL KNOW WHAT YER HIDING, WE DO! I SAW'S IT WITH MY OWN EYES!
IN THE BAMBOO GROVE OVER YONDER!
WITH ALL THEM OTHER MEN, MY GRAND-BOY... CORPSES ALL!
I SA--
FWAMM!
I SAW'S HIM!
OH, HOW HE CHANG-ED... THE CROWS HAIN'T PECKED HIM AT ALL...
...BUT HIS SWOL-LEN FACE LOOKED UP AT ME LIKE...
...LIKE A GHOST...
"GRANNY! GRANNY! I'M INNO-CENT!"
"WHAT KHARMA DONE BROUGHT ME TO THIS PASS?!"

UNTIL MY GRAND-BOY'S CLEARED OF HIS UNJUST FATE...
...THIS OLD HAG NEITHER GOES TO HEAVEN NOR WALKS THE EARTH!
SHE DRAGS YOU ALL TO HELL!!
UOOHHH!
TWAK
GUAA!
THD THD THD
KAHOOOM
EWD EWD EWD EWD EWD
O-SAMURAI-SAMA! MY CHILDREN WAIT FOR THEIR FATHER WITH EMPTY STOMACHS!
HEY! LET GO! LET GO!

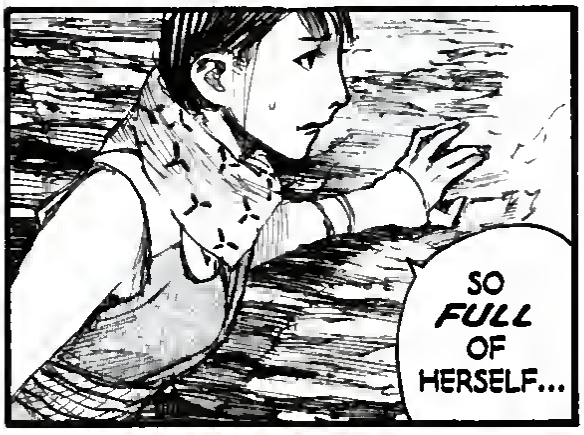
WHAT ARE YOU DAWDLING FOR?!
OH! MURAUCHI-SAMA!
KILL A FEW AND SHUT'EM UP!
UHR! Y-YES, SIR!
SHING!
HECK!
AUUH!
LAW BREAKERS! BEGONE!
OR I'LL TURN YOU TO RUST ON MY SWORD!

KILL US-- AND BE THE FIRST TO BLEMISH THE PEACE OF IENARI-SAMA'S REIGN.
I DOUBT THE GOOD GENTLEMEN WISH THAT FOR THEIR LORD.
HEAVENS. NO ONE'S ASKING YOU TO LET US INTO THE CASTLE.
WH- WHAT...?
BUT IF WE ARE NOT TO HAVE EVEN A GLIMPSE OF OUR MEN...
...AT LEAST... AT LEAST TELL US WHAT HAS BEFALLEN THEM WITHIN, OR WE CANNOT LEAVE.

CAN'T YOU PUT THIS DOWN AND TREAT US MORE GENTLY?
WE ARE JUST WOMEN, AFTER ALL.

ぐあああ!!

EASY TO FIGHT IN, SO SHE PUT IT BACK ON.


SO FULL OF HERSELF...

I WANNA GO HOME!
WELL, I CAN GO AT IT, TOO!
TO BE CONTINUED...!

NEXT MONTH

Taking us back to one of the most harrowing *Blade of the Immortal* battles ever, Nathan Fox's pinup in our next issue will link up with his Magatsu image in *this* issue (facing page) to form a kinetic vertical diptych. You can see more of Nathan's work in current issues of *DMZ*. Thanks, Nathan! And congratulations to recently-wed Rob Guillory (*Short Bus Superstors*), whose art graces the back cover of the comic you're holding now. See you next month, when our vengeful ladies go deeper into the "Badger Hole" and come across a sadistic new villain.

GLOSSARY

Bongoshiro: Head of the bonshū.

Bongoto: The castle watch.

Bonshū: Officers serving under the shogun, usually assigned to Edo Castle to defend the shogun himself.

Bugyō: A high-ranked samurai in charge of keeping the peace, with the help of the men under his command and volunteer "posse" members.

Doimyo: Ruler of a feudal fiefdom.

Ittō-ryū: The radical sword school of Anotsu Kagehisa.

Ienori-somo: Tokugawa Ienari, the eleventh Tokugawa shogun (1773 to 1841).

Kessen-chu: The "sacred bloodworms." A person infected by them cannot die but feels pain like a mortal.

Kon: Unit of measurement, approximately two meters (six feet)

Kitomochi-somo: The *kito-mochibugyō*. There were two *mochi-bugyō* who took turns administering justice and police affairs in the civilian districts of Edo. *Kitamochi-somo* refers to the northern *mochi-bugyō*.

Mochi-bugyō: one of the top governing positions in Edo, a magistrate with the combined powers of a mayor and chief of police. This position was held in monthly rotation by two senior Tokugawa vassals, who were in charge of administration, maintaining the peace, and enforcing the law in Edo. Their rule extended only to commoners, as samurai in Edo were controlled by their *doimyō* and his officers. The *mochi-bugyō* had an administrative staff and a small force of armed policemen.

Mutenichi-ryū: The sword school led by Rin's father (now deceased), destroyed by Anotsu Kagehisa.

Ryū: A sword school.

Tonuki: Often called a "raccoon dog," this animal is similar to a raccoon, a member of the badger family, and common throughout Japan.

Tāshu: Leader, master.

Yoriki: Ranked below the *mochi-bugyō* and above the *dōshin*, the *yoriki* were high-ranking police officers in Edo.

Zukin: A scarf. Used in Japan not only as headgear, but also to wrap and carry small packages.

ABOUT THE SWASTIKA

The main character in *Blade of the Immortal*, Manji, has taken the "crux gammata" as both his name and his personal symbol. This symbol is also known as the *swastiko*, a name derived from the Sanskrit *svastika* (meaning "welfare," from *su*—"well" + *asti*—"he is"). As a symbol of prosperity and good fortune, the *swastiko* was widely used throughout the ancient world (for example, appearing often on Mesopotamian coinage), including North and South America and has been used in Japan as a symbol of Buddhism since ancient times. To be precise, the symbol generally used by Japanese Buddhists is the *souvostika*, which moves in a counterclockwise direction, and is called the *monji* in Japanese. The *sauvastiko* generally stands for night, and often for magical practices. The *swostika*, whose arms point in a clockwise direction, is generally considered a solar symbol. It was this version (the *hakenkreuz*) that was perverted by the Nazis. It is important that readers understand that the *swastika* has ancient and honorable origins, and it is those that apply to this story, which takes place in the 18th century (ca. 1782-3). *There is no anti-Semitic or pro-Nazi meaning behind the use of the symbol in this story. Those meanings did not exist until after 1910.*

ABOUT THE TRANSLATION

The Artwork: The author of *Blade of the Immortal* requested that we make an effort to avoid mirror-imaging his artwork. Some manga are first copied in a mirror-image in order to facilitate the left-to-right reading of the pages. However, Mr. Samura decided that he would rather see his pages reversed via the technique of cutting up the panels and repasting them in reverse order. While we feel that this often leads to problems in panel-to-panel continuity, we place primary importance on the wishes of the creator. Therefore, most of *Blade of the Immortal* has been produced using the "cut and paste" technique. There are, of course, some sequences where it was impossible to do this, and mirror-imaged panels or pages were used instead.

The Sound Effects & Dialogue: Since some of Mr. Samura's sound effects are integral parts of the artwork, the decision was made to leave those in their original Japanese. When it was crucial to the understanding of the panel that the sound effect be in English, however, Mr. Samura chose to redraw the panel. We hope readers will view the un-retouched sound effects as essential portions of Mr. Samura's extraordinary artwork. In addition, Mr. Samura's treatment of dialogue is quite different from that featured in average samurai manga and is considered to be one of the things that has made *Blade* such a huge hit in Japan. Mr. Samura has mixed a variety of linguistic styles in this fantasy story, where some characters speak in the mannered style of old Japan, while others speak as if they were street-corner punks from a bad area of modern-day Tokyo. The anachronistic slang used by some of the characters in the English translation reflects the unusual mix of speech patterns from the original Japanese text.

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GREEN GIANT
Edits